Clatsop County Historical Society Quarterly

CUMTUX

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CCHS IMAGE #860.732

VIEW OF THE DEVASTATION WROUGHT BY THE GREAT ASTORIA FIRE OF 1922.

In This Issue . . .

We had no electricity and no way to heat our house during the storm of December 2007. Downed trees blocked the roads to town. The battery radio was our only connection to the rest of the world. It was days before I drove my car under a leaning tree down the road past barns flattened by the winds to join the long lines at a gas station. Then warm for the first time in days, I headed to the Cove at Seaside where I parked and watched, amazed, at surfboarders out in the ocean riding the waves. Not all are affected in the same way by what most would call a disaster.

Extreme weather events, storms, floods, snow and ice storms have been costly but fires have created more long term difficulties. The Tillamook and Clatsop forest fires, the 1912 Seaside fire, the 1922 Hammond Mill fire and the 1922 Astoria fire would be counted among the worst disasters to hit the county.

In December 2012 will be the ninety year anniversary of the fire that in one night completely changed the face of Astoria's business section. As Carol Lambert has written about the fire, "The dreary weather and the cold of December and early January contributed to the hardships faced by those who had lost so much – in many, many cases, all of their possessions, their livelihoods. It took great courage and determination to carry on and to rebuild their lives, and to rebuild their city."

In this issue, we present some of their stories.

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Front Cover: CCHS image #8088.732
Unidentified women among the ruins.

CUMTUX: Chinook jargon:
"To know...to inform"

EDITORIAL

John S. Dellinger, editor

CALAMITY RIDING on flaming wings has smitten Astoria. The fiery brand has penetrated the vitals of the municipality. Her marts of trade and commerce are destroyed, her people have been driven into the streets by the hundreds, her march toward prosperity has received a grievous setback, a fiery baptism which like a flaming torch will lead us onward to greater triumphs.

But Astoria will not stand in stunned dismay pondering on a past disaster. Already our citizens having conquered the devouring flames are planning to build anew, and in the interim are moving with unflagging zeal toward relief for the needy and helpless victims of the holocaust and toward the safeguarding of the rights of justice and property. Phoenix-like, Astoria is unfolding her wings to arise from a couch of flame with a greater and more splendid glory.

Let every citizen unite with the common purpose to advance, to grow again; let none lag; let none be dismayed. Every Astorian should echo the cry of those, who called upon to do the impossible and dare the utmost on an embattled front in a foreign land, made their slogan of two simple words:

"Lets Go."

LOOKING NE AT THE INTERSECTION OF COMMERCIAL AND 9TH STREETS.

FIRE DEMONS RAVAGE ASTORIA

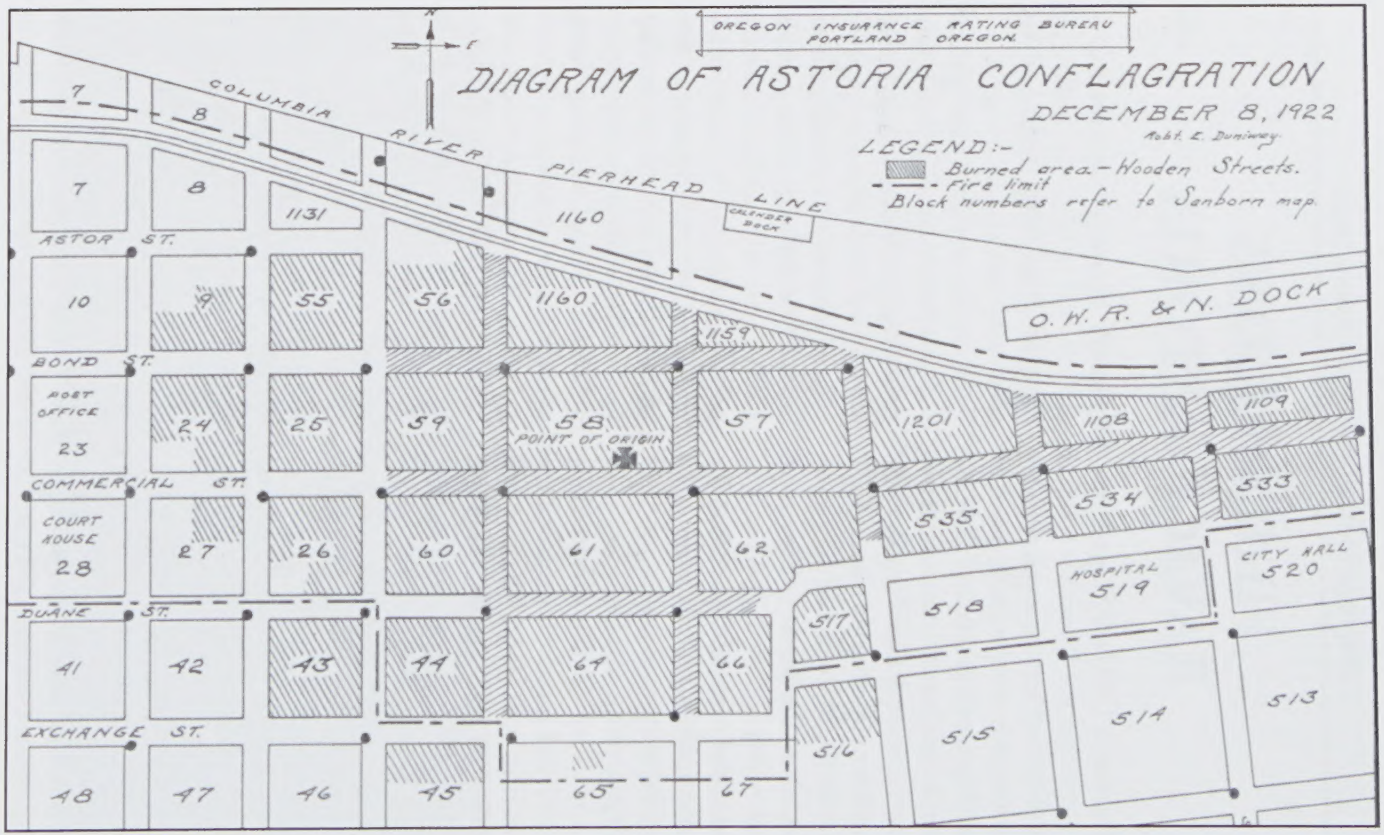
Business District Wiped out—Property Damage $15,000,000

STARTING AT 2:10 o'clock yesterday morning in the basement of Thiel Bros. restaurant and billiard parlor, located on Commercial street between Eleventh and Twelfth, a fire of undetermined origin reduced the entire business section of the city to ashes, caused property damage in excess of $15,000,000, and has sent hundreds of Astoria's citizens into the streets, homeless and in many cases destitute, and scantily attired.

Originating approximately in the center of the block bound by Commercial and Bond streets on the north and south and Twelfth and Eleventh on the east and west, the fire spread with such rapidity that ten minutes after the alarm had been sounded, billowing flame was being flung high above the buildings. In thirty minutes the entire block was ablaze. The frame structures, of too great a height to be reached by the water pressure available on Commercial street, were rapidly consumed. In less than an hour the leaping lances of fire had shot across the street spaces or had roared beneath the wooden viaduct below Commercial street and had ignited buildings in blocks to the south and west.

From this moment until the fire was checked some nine hours later the flames gnawed unceasingly into a wider and wider area until at about 1:30 o'clock yesterday afternoon some 28 blocks in the heart of the business section were but masses of burning debris emphasized here and there by some grotesque fragment of heat wracked masonry that had temporarily defied the elements and stood a mournful sentinel watching darkly over the holocaust below.

Attracted by the general alarm and the glare of the flames which turned night into day, thousands of people gathered in the streets in an ever expanding circle as the throngs were pressed back by the spreading flames. As structure after structure was swept into the fire maw there were those on watch who saw the accomplishment of a life time swept into oblivion. While no definite estimate could be made last night it was indicated by reports that the insurance on the business structures and contents will not cover much more than 50 percent of



This diagram shows the area consumed by the fire.

the actual loss. In regard to personal property losses it is not believed that the coverage will amount to more than twenty percent on an average and in hundreds of cases householders lost their furniture and clothing without having a cent of insurance.

The Fire Area.

The area covered by the fire and within the limits of which structures were practically wiped out, is defined as follows: Beginning at 17th and Commercial streets on a line south to 17th and Duane, thence west to 14th Street along the north edge of Duane, thence south to Exchange and west to 11th street on Exchange. Between 10th and 9th streets the fire moved in a westward direction to Franklin street and then cornered from Franklin to Exchange between 9th street and Eighth. It was on the line of Eighth street that the westward march of the fire was checked, aided by the fireproof barrier interposed by the Spexarth building and a barrage of dynamite on the waterfront streets. The fight at this point was in doubt for over an hour. At one time the flames leaped the barrier the distance between the Spexarth building and the post office and set fire to the interior of the latter structure but this blaze was checked.

On the north line, better success was achieved in checking the blaze. With two high pressure lines from the Stutz pumper, lines from the *Manzanita*, and hydrant lines at work on the structures north of the rails a decisive stop was put on advance by the fire between the entire distance between Eighth and Seventeenth streets. The entire stretch of docks on the river front as well as numerous warehouses were saved.

Viaduct Fatal.

In the eastern fire zone the hollow street construction with its asphalt covering over a wooden base permitted a tremendous spread of the flames. For a time it appeared that the blaze had been checked at 14th street but the fire was sucked under the street surface, and when attempts at putting a halt to the flames were apparently successful, the underground blaze broke out across the street intersection and then spread with terrible rapidity to the corner of 16th and Duane streets where terrific efforts were made to save St. Mary's hospital and the city hall. Dynamite was used unsparingly and the blaze was headed away from these two structures but continued on its way up Commercial and devoured the fire department headquarters structure which went up in a tremendous burst of flame. The fire then took the underground route again and despite barrages of water and dynamite slowly gnawed a path underneath Commercial street. The stubborn blaze had continued its progress up to a late hour last night, but the advance was almost unnotice-

able and was being slowly but surely checked.

More than 220 shops, stores, rooming houses, and places of business and various kinds were burned out yesterday. An approximately complete list is given below.

Department Stores
Bee Hive Department Store
Skallerud Dry Goods Co.,
J.C. Penney, Inc.
Cordz Bros.

Women's Apparel
Ahrens Suit and Cloak House
The Emporium
The Wonder Store
Gordon's Eastern Outfitting Store (also men's)

Men's Apparel
H. Burke & Co.
Brownsville Woolen Mills Co.
Luukinen & Harrison
Boston Clothing Co.
Rice & McCoys
Westenhaver Bros.

Grocery stores.
Acme Grocery Co.
Badollet & Co.
The Central Grocery
Twentieth Century

Grocery
Commercial Grocery
Fisher Bros. (also hardware)
Johnson & Morrison
Importing Grocery
Blue Diamond Market
Mondy's Market
Wahl's Market
Lum Quing Grocers

Restaurants
Allen Café
Andrew and James
Bohemian Grill
Columbia Oyster House
Liberty Café
Delicatessen Shop
Midway Lunch
Olympian Café
Oyster Loaf Café
Palace Restaurant
Parker Café
Pat's Grill

Bakeries
Astoria Bakery
Dixie Baking Co.
Downing Bakeries No. 1 & 2
Oregon Baking Co.

Drug Stores
Astoria Drug Co.
Central Drug Co.
Dayton Drug Co.
Eagle Drug Store
Farr Drug
Owl Drug Store

Furniture Stores
Astoria Furniture Co.
Bigelow Furniture
Greenburg's Furniture & Hardware Co.
Hildebrand & Co.
M. Nelson Furniture Co.
Ross Woodman Furniture Co.
Terrill Furniture Co.

Newspapers
Astoria Evening Budget
The *Morning Astorian*

Printiers
Franklin Press
Commercial Printing.

Millinery Shops
The Fashion Millinery
The Vogue Millinery
The Style Shop

Meat Markets
City Market
Economy Market
Imperial Meat Market
Oregon Meat Market
Paulsen's Fish Market
Peoples Market
Sanitary Fish Market
White House Market

Banks
Astoria National Bank
Columbia Trust and Savings Bank
First National Bank
Astoria Savings Bank
Bank of Commerce

Plumbing Shops
Abrahamson
Astoria Plumbing Co.
P.F. Brach
Cameron and Hermann
J.H. Hansen
W.C. Laws

Cleaners & Dyers
City Cleaners & Tailors
Master Cleaners & Dyers
Sanitary Cleaners & Dyers
Service Cleaners & Dyers
Unique Cleaners
Wilson Cleaning & Dye Works

Theatres
Blue Mouse Theatre
Liberty Theatre
Star Theatre
Astoria Theatre
Columbia Theatre

Garages, etc
Al's Tire Shop
Astoria Storage Battery
Astoria Tire Service
Automotive Electric Co.
F.A. Barnicott
Durant Auto Agency
Gallant Auto Co.

Gorman Auto Co.
Hackett Battery Shop
Maunula Auto Co.
McCann Oetinger & Rasmus, machinists
Highway Tire Service
Klingbell
Tire Sales Co.
Nyquist Motor Car Co.
C. Rowan Motor Co.
Skyles Auto Co.
Walter Smith Garage
Sovey Motor Co.
Staples Motor Co.
Sunset Garage

Pool Halls

Alaska Pool Hall
Astoria Pool Hall
Club Pool Hall
Handleys
Hut Billiard Parlor
Ideal Billiard Hall
Midway Pool Hall
Occident Pool Hall
Overland Billiard Parlor
Thiel Bros.
Waldorf Billiard Parlors

Jewelers.

Bell & Co.
F. Donnerberg
Ekstroms
Schultz Jacobsen
Shaner
Camps.

Paint Shops

Allen Wall Paper Co.
Victor Bloech Wall Paper & Paints
Pacific Painting Co.
Hardware Stores.
Astoria Hardware
McLin Hardware Co.

Electrical Shops.

Astoria Electric Co.
Brown Electric Co.
Ewart Electric Co.
McCartney Electric Co.

Music Stores.

Cline Music Co.
Gribbler Music House

Stage Depots

Astoria-Seaside Stage Line
Columbia Stages
Wholesale Houses
Bell & Co.
Columbia Supply Co.

Marine Dealers

Atlas Gas Engine Agency
The Beebe Ullfers Co.
Cook & Foster
Astoria Marine Supply Co.

Florists

Erickson Floral & Seed Co.
John Erickson

Shoe Stores

S.A. Gimre
D.E. Lagassee
Charles V. Brown

Undertaking Parlors

E.B. Hughes
Pohl & Gilbaugh

Book Dealers

Svenson Book & Paper Co.
Utzinger's Book Store
Kincaids News Co.
Transfer Companies.
Prael Eigner Transfer Co.
Sherman Transfer Co.

Apartments.

Straden
Zapf

Telegram Offices

Western Union
Postal Telegraph

Miscellaneous

American Railways Express
Astoria Shop
Astoria Hide & Junk Co.
Astoria Business College
Astoria Harness Company
Astoria Second Hand Store
Astoria Sign Co.
Baby Shop
City Lumber & Supply
Coffee Land
Cover & Wilsons
Owen-Peeke Feed & Grain Co.
Pacific Net & Twine Co.
Warrenton Investment Co.
Woodfield Art & Gift Shop
Wedekins
Woolworths
The Film Shop
Finnish Lutheran Book Concern
Higgins
Warren & Allen
Geo. Howe & Co.
Jaeger's Confectionery
Northern Second Hand Store
Northwestern Junk Co.

Dairies

Larson Dairy
Sunflower Dairy

Buildings

Fire Department Headquarters
Matson Building
Occidental [Occident] Hotel
Weinhard-Astoria Hotel
Y.W.C.A.

Lodges

Redmen's Hall
Elks Temple
Moose Club
A.O.U.W. Hall
I.O.O.F.
Woodmen of the World
Masonic Temple

Dance Hall

Dreamland Dance Pavilion

Fire Bulletin No. 1

The work of reconstruction has begun on the ashes of the old Astoria a new Astoria will rise. But it's a big job and it needs stout hearts, strong wills and willing hands, and we shall have them all.

With the conflagration still raging, the work of organizing for relief work and to put in effect the first measures necessary to meet the emergency was begun.

Relief headquarters were opened before noon in the YMCA building which was one of the few to escape the flames. With an impromptu committee headed by Rev. W. S. Gilbert of the Presbyterian Church and composed of numbers of other prominent citizens, machinery was at once put into motion to provide food and shelter for the homeless and relief for all those in need of it.

Mayor Bremner before 11 o'clock had sent out the call for a general mass meeting of business men at the city hall, another of the few buildings spared, for 2 o'clock. At 1 o'clock a meeting of the emergency committee was held at the Y and determined upon a course of action but, before announcing anything to the public, wished to submit its decisions to the mayor's mass meeting in order that there may be no conflict.

Seaside Opens Home.

A delegation of Seaside residents were over early to notify the relief committee that the Seaside Hotel is being opened and will offer shelter for all those in Astoria who are homeless. A free bus will leave the YMCA building and all those wishing to go to Seaside are requested to call at the Y.

Portland was on the job early with offers of help. Not only was fire apparatus dispatched down here, but the Chamber of Commerce loaded trucks with provisions and started them down the highway. The state hotel association authorized an appropriation of $5000 for relief work and other contributions are being sent to the mayor.

Budget Bulletin.

The *Budget*, like almost every other business institution, suffered the loss of its plant but it opened offices in the YMCA early in the afternoon and will mimeograph bulletins from time to time simply as a means of keeping the public informed of what is going on, what measures are being put into effect, what cooperation is expected from the general public.

Insurance Is O.

To relieve the anxiety of many

people whose insurance policies were lost in the fires, J. T. Allen, insurance man, announces that all policies will be effective regardless of whether or not they were saved from the flames. G. C. Pauling makes a similar announcement, and says no one should worry.

Norris Staples Dead.

Adding to the tragedy of the occasion was the sudden death from heart failure of Norris Staples, president of the Bank of Commerce and of the Staples Motor Co. he was helping push one of his automobiles along the street to the zone of safety when he suddenly fell forward on the pavement. His son and Lloyd Van Dusen, who were assisting him, immediately secured Dr. Waffle but Mr. Staples died within a few minutes.

Reports that W. H. Fellman and Brenham Van Dusen died are unfounded. The report that Mel Callendar suffered the loss of an ear is likewise untrue. A man suffered a broken leg from being struck by a plank during the blasting. The body of a suicide was found hanging by the neck on the Sanborn docks but his identity has not been established.

Watch for future bulletins.

Evening Budget, 2.45 PM Dec. 8, 1922

Fire Bulletin No. 2

At the mass meeting called by the Mayor at 2 o'clock, the general welfare committee, already named by various welfare organizations and churches, was continued as a permanent committee with Rev. W. G. Gilbert as chairman. Upon authority voted him, he increased his committee to 50 and will add as many more as desired. A meeting of this committee will be held at 11 o'clock tomorrow morning at the city hall to take further action.

Headquarter.

The YMCA will continue to be headquarters for the committee and all inquiries should be taken there. Also all applications for relief and all donations and contributions will be received there.

Banking Bureau.

The front room of the Y will be banking headquarters presided over by a bankers' bureau, C. R. Higgins, chairman. This committee will OK applications for credit at wholesale houses and other places of supply. No money being available, checks cannot be cashed, but these credit credentials from the banking committee will be accepted as trade exchanges.

Relief Supplies.

E. B. Hughes is chairman of a com-

mittee for the distribution of supplies and will attend to all wants of the needy. He has been given authority to draw upon relief funds to purchase any supplies needed. C. A. Humphrey will assist him.

Clothing Supplies.

Grace Williams, secretary of the Y.W. is head of a committee to supply clothing to those needing it and Eileen Walker, county nurse, will have charge of issuing all requisitions for supplies.

Many Relief Offers.

Offers of relief are pouring in. The Red Cross of Portland dispatched a carload of supplies on a special train at 2 this afternoon. The western branch of the Red Cross at San Francisco has authorized an investigation and stands ready to supply any assistance needed. Portland has deluged Astoria with offers of any relief needed and Mayor Baker is en route here to conduct a personal investigation. President Waterhouse of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce wired an offer of sympathy and any needed assistance.

W. P. O'Brien of the Astoria Box Company has donated 300 cords of spruce wood and Austin Osburn has donated a carload. C. W. Halderman has contributed wood and the use of his trucks. The S. P. & S. has offered its depot and coaches for temporary housing and stands ready to haul all homeless people to Seaside where the hotel and cottages are ready for occupancy.

H. R. Hoefler has opened his big home as a temporary hospital and the high school is being used by the Sisters of St. Mary's Hospital temporarily for the accommodation of patients.

F. Kankkonen announces that the Wilson shipyards will be open for storage of automobiles, and he has three living rooms and a mess house where stoves can be set up.

F. Barker of the CRPA has placed the ships *St. Nicholas* and *Reuce* at the disposal of the committee for use in accommodating the homeless.

The Dixie Baking Co. of Portland has sent a truckload of bread down for distribution and Mr. Haynes of that company is here personally to give aid. He went through the San Francisco fire.

The Hammond Lumber Co. has placed the Halco Hotel at the disposal of the committee for housing and storage purposes.

Sherman Lovell announces that the Lovell garage, which escaped the fire, will be available for a receiving and distributing depot.

Fire Bulletin No. 3

Fire Area Patrolled

Chief of Police Carlson has 100 special deputies encircling the fire area and forbids any person to go near the burned over territory. This is a protection to those who have valuables in the ruins.

Sternest measures will be used against any person apprehended stealing or committing other lawlessness.

All soft drink parlors have been ordered closed by the police after nightfall.

Nurses Wanted

Miss Walker, county health nurse, asks that all married nurses report to her at the YMCA this evening if possible, nurse needed for tonight.

Train Schedule

Trains for Portland leave the depot on schedule time and will leave for Seaside on schedule time from the port docks. Stages for Seaside leave Arlington Hotel on 11th. Seaside hotel is open to homeless free of charge.

Business Men's Meeting

Acting President Drake of the Chamber of Commerce has called a meeting of all persons whose businesses were burned out at the court house at 9 in the morning to discuss plans for building a bigger, better and more beautiful Astoria. Let's Go.

State headquarters of the American Legion in Portland have wired Commander Murphey of the local post asking what they can do for us.

The WCTU has charge of serving free lunches in the basement of the YMCA.

All churches and schools have been opened up to the public for whatever uses necessary.

Seaside Mayor Offers Aid.

Mayor E. N. Hurd of Seaside, who was included among the many scores of people from the beach city who came to Astoria this morning during the fire, stated that his community stands ready to offer the homeless people and other victims of the fire every assistance possible. Similar assistance has been proffered by Mayor Frank Warren, of Warrenton.

Fire Bulletin No. 4

Hospital Patients Removed Safely.

One of the greatest tasks in connection with the fire this morning but one which was successfully and quickly accomplished, was the removal to safety in temporary wards at the Astoria High School building of approximately 100 patients, many of them criples.

All men and women patients in the hospital were carried from the big four-story structure at Sixteenth and Commercial [Duane] streets and in ambulances and private cars, conveyed to the high school where members of the medical fraternity of this city administered to their comfort, materially assisting the Sisters of St. Marys to make their wards comfortable in the improvised quarters. Plans for the future care of the sick people are being worked out.

Bread Comes from Portland.

More than 200 loaves of bread from the Dixie Baking Company of Portland arrived in the city on the noon train. Approximately 2000 loaves will come in on the trains reaching here at 5 o'clock and 10:20 o'clock this evening, it was announced by H. H. Hanes and C. E. Foster, owners of the local Dixie bakery burned this morning, who arrived in Astoria at noon in response to a message telling them of the holocaust here, sent to them by Robert F. Moore, manager of the local bakery. This bread is being distributed this afternoon to the stores that remain standing including the Chinese stores on Bond Street, Kellys at 17th and Commercial and others where it may be obtained.

List Your Spare Rooms.

Many rooms will be needed by the General Relief Committee to house the local citizens whose homes and apartments were destroyed. If you will have a spare room for one day, several days, a week or a month, please list it at once at the headquarters of the committee at the YMCA, corner 12th and Exchange Streets. Those men or women who will volunteer their services in the relief work are asked to report.

ARE WE DOWNHEARTED? NO –Q.

Memories of Astoria's Great Fire, December 8, 1922.

by August Hildebrand

During the night of December 7–8th, 1922—about 2 o'clock am—I was awakened by my wife to find a fire was in the lower, that is, the business part of Astoria.

Through the diligence and alertness of my son Frank, who had first given us the alarm, one of our furniture trucks was soon carrying us down the hill to our business location, a block and a half west of the fire. At the time we arrived the fire was yet confined to one building, that of Thiel Brothers, just west of the building known as the Bee Hive.

It did not seem a serious blaze at first—there were three brick buildings, many wooden buildings and two streets between our building and the fire—and it seemed that the fire,

CCHS image #595.400b

The Bee Hive department store located mid block, north side of Commercial Street, between 11th and 12th.

CCHS IMG# #052.001.020

Looking East on Commercial from 11th Street. The Bee Hive store is the white three-story building on the left, mid-way down the street. The fire started next door in Thiel Bros. restaurant and billiard parlor.

though burning bright and fierce, would or could soon be under control. Presently the fire began to consume the three story frame Bee Hive building to the east. No one seemed to fear any great conflagration, but word was passed that there was a lack of water. There was no wind and it had started to rain with occasional flurries of snow. This was considered fortunate and no doubt checked the flames considerably.

Apparently the fire was gaining—the Bee Hive store was soon a mass of flames. We were told that the fire was advancing to the north and east, away from us. All this time we were in front of our store on Commercial Street to the west of the fire. We thought there was no special danger and felt no alarm. By this time the electric lights went out. We kept the doors of the store locked. There were no great number of people on the streets and no great excitement. Some Jewish merchants in a brick building near the fire started to move some of their merchandise to the intersection of Ninth and Commercial Streets toward our store. We thought this was foolish as the brick building seemed to us good barrier against the fire.

The fire gained steadily and presently I gave orders to prepare to save the merchandise. By the time the fire had leaped from the Bee Hive building across the street to the Knights of Pythias building, another three-story frame wood building. This first caught fire at the top, the flames moving down. The inside of our store was dark, the light from the fire was not as yet sufficient to penetrate the darkness. We always kept candles on hand in case of electric light trouble. This rule served us well in this instance. We cut the candles in halves, placed and pasted them in saucers and formed in this way safe candle-sticks for the candles. We distributed these in various parts of the store, placing them high so as to gain as good a light as possible. Our force consisted of Frank Hildebrand, Roy Cole, Curtis Cole, Otto Cole and William Washburn. It was explained to them that only such goods were to be saved as would stand handling and goods that represented the most value. Such things as crockery, show cases, and the higher grade of furniture and upholstered goods that were likely to be damaged by water and handling were to be left for the present to their fate. Everything was to go according to orders. They first began to lower the 9 by 10 rugs and to roll them neatly and carefully so that they would be ready to carry out. By this time we had gotten down two trunks that we had kept for sale; in these we placed the contents of our safes and such other books and papers as were comfortably near.

From outside it looked as though the fire might yet be gotten under control. There was on the street corner toward the fire a rooming house in

CCHS IMAGE #5227.4001

Hildebrand & Co. store located near the south east corner of Commercial and 10th Streets, next to the Odd Fellows building.

which we had an interest in the way of furniture sold. This was to have been turned back to us in a few days. There was no direct insurance on this furniture by us, that is, just a few days before we refused to insure direct, relying upon any insurance the party owning the furniture might have. We had expected that the furniture would soon be turned over and removed by us. It was a chance we took for a sum of about $600. We were now debating with ourselves as to the saving of this furniture. By this time the fire had assumed such dimensions that it was a matter of saving most anything and this anything was handier at our store, so we now began to load the trunks into one of our large furniture trucks, that is, the trunks with the books, first, then trunks filled with bedding, blankets and pillows, etc. Also one trunk filled with silver plated tableware such as knives, forks and spoons; also some tools such as hammers, saws, planes, etc. These trunks protected the goods from water in the form of rain and subsequently fire-hose water. The fire was by this time in front of and near our store and the hose was wetting things in general. The firemen did not seem to make any impression on the fire, which seemed to advance in a steamroller fashion,

CCHS IMAGE #5072.400H

Majestic range demonstration at Hildebrand & Co., June 29, 1922

CCHS IMAGE #5072.400H.A

Inside Hildebrand's during the Majestic Range demonstration.

CCHS IMAGE #052.001.037

I.O.O.F. (Independent Order of Odd Fellows) building, South East corner of Commercial and 10th Streets.

not very fast but irresistibly.

On the top of the trunks we piled the rugs, previously neatly rolled, and protected the protruding ends with furniture covers and old canvas. By this time one truck was filled and the orders were given to take the same to the garage on the hill and leave it in the same loaded. Soon the small truck and the touring car were in front of the store and things were being placed in them—cooking goods, small rugs, carpet sweepers, etc. At this time John Christians, my brother-in-law, was with us and aided considerably in the saving of goods. Now an order was given by the Fire Department to dynamite the buildings to stay the progress of the fire. My brother-in-law having to do with the county affairs,

CCHS IMAGE #000.00003

THE NEW I.O.O.F. BUILDING AT THE SE CORNER OF 10TH AND COMMERCIAL. HILDEBRAND'S NEW FURNITURE STORE IS TO THE LEFT AS IT WAS PRIOR TO THE FIRE.

left us in order to get dynamite which was a few miles out of town. By this time the dynamite of the fire department had all been used.

We worked like Trojans, but without undue haste. Some other merchants had moved or tried to move their stock, others were not present or thought it prudent not to disturb their stock or perhaps thought the fire would be controlled on the next intersection of a street. At any rate some stores were not opened at all. I thought this part strange. One party, Mr. Cordz, having his dry goods store in the Odd Fellows three story brick building, next west of our building, living across the street upstairs over a jewelry store, a wooden building, moved his furniture from this location into his store (a brick building) closed the doors and evidently thought them safe. We thought so ourselves.

By this time the back of our store building was burning with a bright flame, but the front was free of smoke and excessive heat, as the draft that the fire created was inward toward the fire and therefore in our favor. The firemen were working with the fire hose in front of the building. Once more I ventured in, telling the firemen so that they might know. I picked up a few more articles, but finally at the urgent suggestion of my son Frank, I quit the store for good.

The building was soon a mass of flames. It was thought that while this building being of wood, and its contents, furniture, making it very susceptible to the inroads of fire, that the three story brick building with

CCHS IMAGE #052.001.079

First National Bank at the SW corner of 10th and Bond Streets (Marine Drive today).

its massive wall next to our building would stay the progress of the flames. On the cross street next to this building we watched through the large show windows and could see the glare of our own burning building through the lower sky glass that covered the dry goods store's lower part. The metal and glass, however, could not withstand the heat and presently the flames burst through this skylight, eating their way into the dry goods store. Once in, the building was doomed, the brick walls were acting as a sort of chimney, creating a draft upward.

Now we were sure that even this building could not resist the flames and looked toward another rooming house, the furniture of which we just lately had bought. This furniture we had also intended to remove in a few days and had not placed any insurance on it. This rooming house, constructed of wood, was as yet over a block away with two streets intervening. Again we thought that possibly there was no danger to this location. However, we were prudent and ordered all hands to stand by. The small truck and the touring car stood ready at the place. The fire by this time travelled toward the south and north of its origin. One after another, the buildings were consumed, and when the First National Bank building, which was a three story brick structure, similar to the Odd Fellows

CCHS IMAGE #2009.935

Intersection of 9th and Commercial Streets. What remained of the First National Bank can be seen on the left.

building, was afire, orders were given to save the furniture in our rooming house. By now the buildings, here and there, were being dynamited, we could hear the awful concussions, a sort of a dull thud, one could feel the air vibrating and hear the windows rattling, breaking and falling. Long before this, when the Spexarth Gun and Ammunition Store took fire a regular small-arm fire, that sounded like irregular machine gun explosions, had filled the air; but now it seemed like heavy artillery and "Big Berthas" were getting in their play, all this with the crackling of the flames, etc. sounded as though we were in the thick of a battle.

The furniture spoken of in the rooming house was of a fairly good grade. Orders were given that when a bed was carried out that the rails should under no condition be forgotten—that a thing should be saved whole, not parts. The flames were by now just across the street, the heat could be felt to grow in intensity. Some windows were by this time broken by percussion of the blasting, the shades and curtains were flapping in and out of the broken windows. The blasting was going on right near us, but we were fortunate in that this building was not as yet ordered blown down. Everyone was told to stay away from the windows as flying glass from the blasting might injure if near. Everything went along orderly

CCHS IMAGE #2007.935

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks building, 11th and Exchange

in our work, we were working as rapidly as we could. We were tired and somewhat exhausted. One load after another we took down the stairs. Two rooms were as yet locked with Yale locks, the others had only common locks and had been easily opened with a pass key. The keys to the Yale locks were in the dry goods store down stairs, which was as yet closed. Look for the proprietor of the store? What is the use? No time.

"Here is where your bulk comes in handy" said I to Otto and Roy Cole, 225 and 235 pounds, respectively, "Break this door in." A couple of shoves with the shoulder elephant-like, a couple of kicks with number 12 shoes, and we had before us a perfectly good player piano to take down stairs. It was near the window, and hot on that side from the flames across the street. Four of us soon moved it, but it got stuck in the doorway. We could not move it through this way. A dilemma! Fortunately there was another door, but toward the flames. Well, we must do something. Back into the room toward the flames—elephant and foot ball tactics again on another door, through with the piano, again through another door, down stairs with it, creaking and cracking and straining. We got it down without serious damage. This was the last thing saved out of the building. A perfectly good new Hosier cabinet, an ice chest, linoleum on all the floors, shades and

Image courtesy of the editor

BPOE, 11th and Exchange, September 12, 2011. The Lodge members spent nearly $250,000 building this new building after the fire.

draperies on the windows—all had to be abandoned. However, we had saved 80 per cent of the goods and were satisfied. From the sidewalk we moved the goods three times, to keep them out of the flames, before we finally conveyed them into our garage warehouse on the hill.

The flames were by now licking on the Spexarth building with cement roof, cement floors, and cement stair-case. It seems as though this building was surely fire-proof. It is to all intents. The over-lapping cornice of the roof and the wooden window shutters were lined with tin or sheet iron. This simply melted and the window frames and cornice started to burn as a consequence. Fortunately the buildings next to this were of low construction and some were razed with dynamite and others torn down. The Spexarth building after a severe scorching was saved.

The government dredge, Clatsop, was lying at Parker dock, the lower part of Sanborn dock, and had a hose lying on Eighth Street. Chinatown was by this time in flames, they were already leaping Eighth Street and starting on the part of Chinatown lying west of Eighth. The water hose from this vessel stopped the progress of the fire west of Eighth Street by concentrating the efforts west of Eighth street, allowing east of this on Bond street to burn itself out. This vessel stayed further progress of the fire toward the Standard Oil tanks which were located several blocks farther west. It was raining at times. We had the piano, dressers and other

goods protected with carpets, rugs and canvas as well as we could under the circumstances. The last load was the piano. We took it right into our house and then—COFFEE for all hands! How refreshing and strengthening this coffee tasted!

The fire, which by this time had run its course to the west, had assumed vast proportions to the east. Our direct interests had been taken care of, and, as we were tired and exhausted, we watched the fire from our home on Fifteenth street and Jerome. The Logan building on Sixteenth street and Commercial was burning and threatening destruction to the city hall and hospital which were near. We could see the explosions from the blasting, and felt the detonations. The windows rattled but no damage was sustained that far up the hill. Soon the fire engine station on Seventeenth and Commercial was a mass of flames. The tall Stradan Apartment House (the old Ford and Stokes building remodeled) which apparently had withstood the fire, that is, the fire had eaten its way to the north of the street and passed this building and now was coming back in a circle, was soon a mass of flames.

The patients from the hospital had been transferred to the high school building on Jerome Street away up the hill. The firemen were now fighting to save the hospital and city hall and were apparently succeeding. It was now almost 9 o'clock in the morning. Here and there fires were flaming up in the burning district and near it, but in the main it seemed to be under control.

A casual observance the next day showed that the distance from Seventeenth Street to Eighth Street and from the railroad right of way to and including Duane Street and the major part back to Exchange Street was totally destroyed. Fortunately, and thanks to the Portland fire company and the various steamers along the wharfs the river front district was saved. The burnt district compared with the whole city, roughly speaking: the body was entirely consumed; the head, legs and arms were left. It was surely a sad spectacle to behold. Hundreds of buildings were destroyed, millions of dollars went up in flames, and thousands of people were homeless and coverless.

The order that had been observed during the fire by practically all was continued the next day, and the next and so on. Measures were taken to continue this order. It seemed as though no one cared to start anything. Some had a kind of dazed and tired look. Marines and soldiers arrived, a soup kitchen was opened and everything done to comfort those who had suffered. The relief was prompt, efficient and orderly, and surely the army and navy showed that in relief work they could act quickly and efficiently. Praise and thanks are due them. A war ship played a search

light on the ruins at night that gave the whole a sort of ghostly panoramic effect. Looters were supposed to be kept away from the burned district by this display of light. Besides all this, sentinels were placed in and around the burned area. Everything went on smoothly. Some dissatisfaction was voiced in the administration of the Red Cross Work. Many had lost everything, their families were without groceries, meat, etc., temporarily at least. Of course, if given time they could procure money or its equivalent, but not just this morning or this day. The Red Cross expected everyone who sought aid to declare themselves really in need, a good many refused to make statements. In such cases it was really hard to make a distinction and worse to refuse aid. Perhaps after disappointing some, the most were satisfactorily taken care of, and in a few days the really needy ones availed themselves of this charity—it should not be called charity, it was in fact relief.

At a citizens mass meeting at the court house (this building was saved) soon after the fire, the matter of insurance was touched upon. From all statements made, it seemed that the fire victims thought that as the fire was of such a sweeping and complete nature that the insurance question was a simple one of total loss and a simple matter for the insurance companies to pay this loss. However, the representatives of the Fire Insurance Companies began at once to talk about proofs of losses, estimates of losses, etc. This seemed to puzzle some. Proof, why? Of course the proofs were there. What other proof could there be than that the objects insured were not there any longer? They were consumed by fire. Some cement and brick walls were left to tell that there had stood a house. Some charred bath tubs, broken iron beds, etc., were there, which told that there had been a dwelling or rooming house. Some charred cans told of a grocery store. Even hunks of roasted meat on which the sea gulls were feasting indicated that there had been a butcher shop. An endless conglomeration of what once had been iron goods told of a hardware store. What other proofs were necessary?

Mr. Sanborn, the man of action, spoke up, saying that there should be no "tom fooling" about proof of losses, estimates, etc., as the loss was apparent and total, the payment should be made promptly and in total. This of course suited the assemblage, but in a while it seemed that the fire insurance men insisted upon some kind of proof. It was apparent to everyone that they were trained in their work. One told about the great San Francisco fire when by tactics and technicalities the fire sufferers were kept out of their money for weeks, months, years, and some never got any compensation. This had a depressing effect.

So proof was wanted, especially after everything that could establish

Reconstruction after the 1922 fire. The Elliot Hotel, upper left, is nearly comple
12th and Duane, future site of the Liberty Theatre. At left is 13th street, only one
awkward corner of 13th and Duane wa

CCHS IMAGE #3372.900

UST BELOW IS THE LOT WHERE THE WEINHARD HOTEL HAD STOOD ON THE NE CORNER OF
K LONG, DIVIDING MCCLURE'S ASTORIA, AT TOP, FROM SHIVELY'S ASTORIA, AT BOTTOM. THE
NDED OFF TO EASE TURNING THE CORNER.

CCHS MMF #08 055 004

Commercial and 14th looking west ca. 1920.

CCHS IMAGE #08.055.005

Commercial and 14th looking west ca. 1935.

CCHS IMAGE #H835.935

Commercial and 17th looking west, December 8, 1922.

the proof was missing, excepting the ruins. An insurance committee was formed by the citizens and many availed themselves of their good office—some with effect, some without. It happened that I thought that I had a clear case of loss as I had saved some of my records, and some of my goods. As I had suffered in different locations, I thought it prudent to present claims for them, not in one lump nor at one time, but present them as I continued to prepare evidence of their loss. The very first claim we put in was for a hotel or rooming house that had been destroyed in which I had an interest in the way of furniture, etc. to the amount of $1000 or over. The owner, a lady, presently arrived at my house wanting to put in the claim. By then I as yet had no time to unpack the trunks in which the records were placed at the time of the fire, but I knew that the amount total of furniture placed by me in the building was in the neighborhood of $2400 and started on the inventory with "Merchandise from Hildebrand & Co., $2400," and had the party itemize and value below this amount whatever other goods were in the building at the time of the fire. The total amounted to over $4000, and as the insurance was $3000, it was deemed of sufficient value. With this proof or inventory and valuation we went to the adjuster. The first thing he asked was: "This first amount, $2400, is this the sum of the items below, the itemized statement?" When told it was not, but that it was the sum total of furniture that was in this building as furnished by Hildebrand & Co. and that the other goods were besides these contained in the building, the statement was handed back as not sufficient, that the $2400 must also be itemized. I explained that it was not possible to do this as on account of the fire the records might be lost or destroyed, that I was willing to swear that the total was within $100 of the amount, and that the proprietor of the hotel was also willing to go on oath as to the value and goods.

We were told that even that was not sufficient, that an itemized statement of this amount must be found. "But suppose it cannot be found what then?" A shrug of the shoulder and an expression of the face told us that we were in bad if this list could not be produced. I told him "You shall have the itemized statement and then I shall expect you to come through.

The itemized statement was soon procured, as it was among the papers saved. Apparently everything was found to be satisfactory and we were told that the loss would be paid in Portland. This was satisfactory. The proprietor went to the Portland office at the appointed time only to be sent back to Astoria. I myself went to Portland only to be told to go back to Astoria again. This was somewhat exasperating, but what could we do? Coming back to Astoria we were told

that the papers had not arrived, etc. By this time our blood was somewhat stirred. I told them that the statements in Portland and Astoria did not agree, and that so far as I was concerned they must agree, etc. Was then asked to wait till about 4 PM and the mail would be in and matters would be O. K. This request was made in a polite way and accepted in the same manner. At 4 o'clock I was told that everything was O. K. but that I must really go to Portland once more. By this time it dawned on me, that it was a pleasure to pay the insurance premiums, the fire was an accident; but that it was real pain and hard labor to collect the insurance money. It was a matter of "We are from Missouri, you must show us. Yes, we can see the pile of ashes, we can see the piles of brick, etc. Are they really the remains of your possessions? Were they really insured in our company? Were they really worth the amount of insurance you placed on them, etc., etc., etc.,?"

After considerable delays the whole of the insurance money was paid us to our entire satisfaction.

During the time I was sparring, so to speak, with the insurance adjusters about the value destroyed, I happened to meet Andrew Young and his wife. Most every one in Astoria knows this quiet and estimable couple. For the sake of those who do not know them let me say the following: Andrew has made his money in the salmon canning business in British Columbia and Alaska—a business that requires a sort of a pioneer spirit, a lot of study as to the habits of the fish, etc., some mechanical skill as to the erection and running of a salmon cannery, some scientific knowledge as to the preservation of the product, some patience, and a lot of hard work. The finished product the canned salmon is generally sold through a broker.

I mention all these things in particular, as I wish you to know that Andrew never was a horse trader, nor does he have that suave smile of a clothing merchant. Andrew accumulated what is known as a Dutchman's fortune, invested some of his money in Astoria, is about 70 years of age, is living in the residence part of Astoria on the hill in a modest home; living with his family a quiet and satisfied life.

"Well, Andrew, How did the fire strike you? How much insurance did you carry?" "Oh, about $4,000." "What! Only $4000 on a $40,000 brick building? What is the idea?"

Andrew is naturally slow of speech. His wife finally answered in a measured tone: "You see, Mr. Hildebrand, it was like this: Mr. Young had so much trouble with the fire insurance adjusters at a fire before this one—the one several years ago that destroyed the building before this one—that he simply got discouraged and did not care to be bothered with any insurance. The adjusters wanted to know this and that and that and this

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The new Bee Hive Department store located at 10th and Commercial Streets.

and you know Mr. Young is not much of an explainer." This statement was accepted with a mingled sort of a feeling of regret, and a feeling that Mr. Young surely now had saved himself the bother of detailed explanation as to the value destroyed perhaps.

The feature of temporary location was exploited by the different parties interested to an extent that deserves mentioning.

The whole business part of the town was destroyed excepting some minor stores on the outskirts of the town. Astor Street Section and lower Bond street below the post office was saved. In the Bond Street part about two-thirds of what is known as Chinatown was destroyed, one third remaining, with some residences farther west and a Standard Oil filling station across the street. Astor Street, the ancient, now more or less abandoned red light district with some good and some dilapidated buildings had remained intact. It seemed a natural refuge for business locations of the fire sufferers. To cite my own case will be sufficient to explain the general conditions prevailing: A former garage, a remodeled wooden building in fairly good repair and of good exterior look was just about this time changing ownership. The morning after the fire I spoke for one-fourth of the floor space—the total space of the whole being 50 by 100 feet. After some promising, some jockeying and shifting of locations within the 40 by 100 space I was assigned to a stall about 15 by 50 with one ordinary window—and one tolerably large double door at the rate of $100 per month. I asked for more space for this money but was refused. I moved in. By this time the corner, a space about 20 by 20 was rented for a butcher shop at $150 per month, another corner 20 by 20 for a restaurant at $125, another space of about 20 by 20 for a cigar store of $50 per month. On the side street another of about 25 by 50 for an employment place at $125 and the back porch of about 25 by 50 was reserved

for an auto repair shop. Right next to me a place 20 by 50 remained vacant, also a space of about 10 by 20 on the front street did not seem to be wanted. This all was in one building.

After a week or two seeing the empty space next to my location I asked for the same without any increase of rent. This was of course a preposterous question from the landlord's side of view. I was finally told that at an increase of $50 per month, it might be thought of. I did not answer but next day I took possession.

It must be stated that a conservative rent price for the entire whole building before the fire was about $100 per month and the fire advanced the price to about $700 over night.

An outstanding feature of the fire was the formation and workings of the Committee of 10, who formed a sort of government within a government, they collected and distributed the relief money and in various ways aided the city government as well as the citizens direct.

The rebuilding of the city, was rather slow, but one thing stood out forcefully—and that was, that those who were thought least able financially to rebuild were the first ones who started building operations. Even Mr. Spexarth, who has always been looked upon as reactionary rose up to the occasion. He was one of the first to start building operations on two buildings. Besides these—as a good measure, he is building a four story concrete apartment house. Mr. Spexarth deserves credit for his enterprise. He has faith in the city, he shows true patriotism. The money he made in the community he replaced in it.

I will make a statement here that will surprise a good many: That considering the size and population of Astoria—more money has been made in this city than any other city on the coast. This is saying something, but I am sure it is true. The only trouble, on account of lack of small manufacturing concerns, a great deal goes out again.

Looking back twelve months we find that a good start has been made of a greater and grander Astoria. The cement retaining walls of the streets and the sewer system have been completed. Enough substantial fire proof buildings have been erected and under construction to make a good impression.

With a little patience and cooperation we—(you and I) will yet place Astoria on the map of the U.S. to the prominence her location entitles her to.

Vol. 2, No. 2, Spring 1982 Cumtux, pages 22–23.

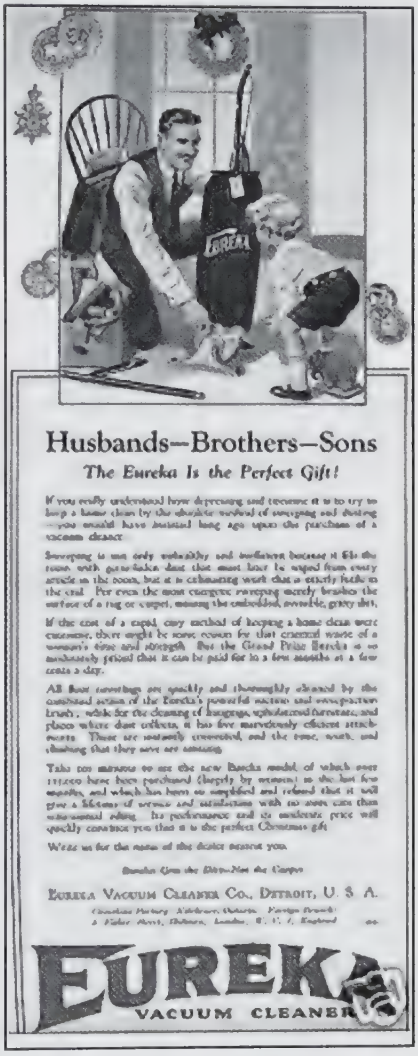
The Most Important Possession

Excerpt from "Harris A. Goodall" by Don Goodall

When the great fire hit Astoria on December 8, 1922, it created one of those incidents upon which family lore is built. I can remember standing at midnight in the middle of Bond Street watching as flaming debris shot skyward amid a shower of sparks while workmen tried desperately to stop the conflagration with dynamite.

In the midst of all this a representative for Standard Oil came by to warn us to get out "because if that fire reaches the oil storage tanks on Astor (between 2nd and 3rd) you'll be blown clear to China." He suggested we take our most important possessions and get out.

Needless to say, this created some consternation. The situation did not necessarily contribute to the most logical thought processes. At any rate, to my father the most important thing to save was the new vacuum cleaner he had just bought my mother. Store receipts, clothing, vital legal papers and other items perhaps more important than a vacuum cleaner were forgotten. The image of my father, standing there with the cleaner in hand, ready to flee, was indelibly etched in our memories and recalled with hilarity on many an occasion over the years.



From family correspondence of the Tallant, Carruthers and Buchanan families

edited by Carol Carruthers Lambert

On Friday, December 8, 1922, from his home on Grand Avenue, Eben Weld Tallant wrote wrote the letter that follows on the next page to his older grandson, Richard Tallant "Dickie" Carruthers, who was a third year student in Architecture at the University of Oregon. Eben Hunter Carruthers, Dick's younger brother, attending his first year in Engineering at Oregon State University, just happened to be at the family's Jerome Street home with their widowed mother, Louise Tallant Carruthers. Louise and "Uncle Tod"(Robert Rex Carruthers), with his wife Helen Dawson and their two daughters, lived next door to the Carruthers' home.

Will (William Easton Tallant, older son of E. W. Tallant) and Nathaniel Weld "Nat" (younger son of E. W. Tallant) were Louise Tallant Carruthers' brothers. Will, and Will's wife Clara Starbuck Tallant, along with Nat, and Nat's wife Florence Ross Tallant, lived in the large house on the southeast corner of Irving and Seventeenth.

Following the sudden death of Richard Ervin Carruthers on 22 July 1922, Louise and Tod had become the owners of the Carruthers' Astoria Hardware Company store on Commercial Street near the corner of Twelfth. The Tallant family owned the Tallant-Grant Packing Company on the banks of the Columbia River. Dick, Eben, Tod (Robert) and Louise Carruthers, along with Eben, Will and Nat Tallant were experimenting with processing salmon eggs (roe) for sports fishermen. The eggs, "jumbos" and "clusters", were prepared in a special "secret" solution and then packed in either glass jars or tins under the brand name "Ketch-Em Roe." This was the beginning of what was to become a profitable business in the fishing industry despite the setbacks caused by the 1922 fire.

Both families pitched in to help save whatever they could from the raging fire that tore along the downtown streets and destroyed so many businesses.

Friday, 5.30' PM
My Dear Dickie

This has been a terrible day. Everybody [has] been up and on high strain since 2.30' this morning. Your mother [Louise Tallant Carruthers] and Eben [Dick's younger brother] were among the first to get down town. Eben hurried down with Uncle Tod—got to the store just as it started burning. Could not get any thing out of the safe. Your mother with Uncle Nat and Florence followed soon after. The fire spread with amazing rapidity and they soon saw the factory was in danger. Uncle Will, Nat, Tod and Florence worked like Trogens [sic] getting out the [salmon] eggs. Lucky they were all cased up. Will's, Nat's and Tod's cars took about two hundred up to the house and they threw others into the lot [an empty lot next to their cannery]. Worked until the fire broke out in the warehouse, then ran for their lives. Eben left his nice new overcoat behind and Uncle Will his rain coat.

This afternoon they had Seaborg to haul up balance—all are now in the garage. 368 cases. Your mother has [$] two thousand insurance on the place—which will just about cover the loss of eggs and material.

Rained hard all day, and cans got wet. Am afraid they will all have to be repacked.

I presume newspapers have given you a full account of the disaster. It's a most severe blow to Astoria and a big set back.

All four banks burned. No money to be had. Fortunately I had quite a sum and was able to lend your mother and Uncle Nat each to buy groceries from the little stores on the hill.

Affectionately
Your
Grand P.

Obviously composing a telegram to send to his mother, Dick wrote the following note on the reverse of his Grandfather Tallant's letter.

Am leaving tonight for home.
Dick
Have arranged with University.

In a letter addressed to Mary Maurine Buchanan, this second

account was written the same day by Maurine's father, John Andrew Buchanan, a local lawyer, and her young sister Luvina Louise. They give their first-hand account of the Astoria fire of December 8, 1922. At that time, J. A. and Madge B. Buchanan resided at 517 Grand Avenue, just two doors east of the Presbyterian Church. Evidently they took a boarder or two into their home. After returning to his home later on the day of the fire, Maurine's father recorded the first part of the letter on the typewriter he had just managed to rescue from his office before the fire reached his office located on the second floor of the I. O. O. F. building at 166 10th Street, between Commercial and Duane. His letter was typed on the reverse side of a scrap of paper he had saved from the fire—a recent letter he had received from the American Legion.

Louise Buchanan was still attending Astoria High School. The previous September, Maurine had begun her first year at U. of Oregon. Upon her graduation from Astoria High School on June 16, 1922, Richard Tallant Carruthers presented Maurine with a large University of Oregon photograph album. The Astoria fire letter to her is pasted in that album along with memorabilia from her four years at the University of Oregon.

Astoria, Oregon
December 8, 1922
Dear Maurine,

The town is burned up, but we are all O. K. Started this morning about 2 or 2:30, near Theil's [sic] or the Bee Hive, or somewhere near there. Spread rapidly. Everything burned from the Post Office to 17th Street, on Commercial Street. Spexarth Building was gutted but is still standing. Burned all four banks, Elk's Building, YWCA, entire block where Astoria National Bank stood, Weinhard Hotel, Astoria Business College. Burned up this way as far as the Methodist Church. That and the Arlington Hotel still stand, also YMCA, Hospital saved, not so sure about City Hall, because I just came from there, and they were having a hard fight. I thought when I left that they would save it. Also the row of houses where Mrs. Calloway lives.

The I. O. O. F. Building went early. I didn't save much, my typewriter and stand, chairs, a dozen or so of books, and most of my important records. I have $1000 insurance, but my loss will be more than twice that, probably three times that amount. Worst fire I ever saw, and it is still burning, 11:45 AM Don't know what I will do for an office, make my office at home I guess. But I am not the only one. Most of the lawyers are rendered officeless. Also most of the doctors. Well, we

will get along some way.

The hospital patients were taken up to the high school. No school for about two week I guess. Shows, Dreamland, bakeries, groceries, Babist [sic] and practically nothing left. No streets left as the stilts were burned beneath them. Many made homeless. No place to live, nothing to eat hardly, nothing saved from any of the stores. Automobiles burned and three men died of heart failure: Fellman, Staples, Van Dusen. Many groggy with the smoke.

Louise typed the following addition to her father's letter.

The fire started at one o'clock this morning. We woke up by the glare on the houses. Thought it was daylight. Dad, Miss [Ruth] Hove and myself dressed hastily and went down. Only part of the block that Gordon's are in was burning then. No one tho't there was any real danger. No water power. Big wind. It spread like wildfire but there was no help. It was a living furnace. People were only in their nite clothes. Dad's office was only about a block away from the flames and I told him he better move out while there was yet a chance but he didn't think it would come that far. No lights. When his blick [block] started we felt our way into the building but in the office everything could be seen as the flames were across the street. Took the most valuable stuff out as soon as we could. Mr. Wire helped us move the little that we got out. Dad started to go back for more but I got Mr. Wire to hold him as the things were falling inside and he wouldn't have gotten out alive. The heat was very oppressive but it was hard to move, so we only made it a few blocks. Dad tried to get a truck but the fire was about on us when he did. Took the stuff home. I was never so tired in all my life. I carried his great big Building and loan books, made about 6 trips. Everyone was dragging valuables from their homes. Went home and found mother feeding family after [family] of destitute folks. For awhile we were afraid it would come up to our house. The girls packed all their things. Went down again and the fire had spread many blocks farther. Lots of hi kids had to watch their homes burn. We helped to brake (sic) into a shop and save the valuables. Portland sent some help and they are now blasting, the windows are falling out of all the houses. Well, Dad wants to mail this so will tell you about it some other time.

Louise and Da.

J. A. Buchanan added a note at the bottom:

We are going to house some people tonite.

Buchanan was in the daily habit of recording items in what he called his "diary books." In his Standard Daily Journal of 1922, J. A. Buchanan entered the following notes on December 7, 1922. For so many years he had judiciously kept track of the days' temperatures at 8 AM and at 7 PM, with a reference to the main weather system of the day.

Thursday, December 7, 1922

8 AM 36 degrees Snow 7 PM 40 degrees.

Began snowing at 8 am. First this winter. Snowed "off and on" all forenoon. Melted as it fell.

Friday, December 8, 1922 8 AM

8 AM 36 degrees Rain 7 PM 40 degrees

Fire originated in or near Theil's [sic] place on Commercial between 11th & 12th, about 2 AM I was awakened about 2:45 and dressed and got down town about 3. Louise with me. Did not think my office Odd Fellows Building would go so started removing things too late. Saved C. S.& L. A. [Clatsop Savings & Loan Association] records & books other corporation records then started on personal stuff. With help of Louise and Bess Huff and Ruth Hove, saved typewriter & stand, chairs and 29 Oregon Reports. Building went down about 4:30. Fire not under control until after noon. Burned 34 blocks about 40 across, clean. After getting goods on street, moved them twice further up 10th St., and finally got a dray and took what little I saved to my home, 517 Grand.

Saturday, December 9, 1922

8 am, 35 degrees Rain 7 PM 38 degrees

Set up my office in home for the present. Burned area under guard.

Sunday, December 10, 1922

8 am, 34 degrees Rain 7 PM 37 degrees

Welfare organizations are operating. National Guard "rolling kitchen," came in Friday evening and is fielding about 1000 each meal. Headquarters in Y.M.C.A., which was saved.

Monday, December 11, 1922

8 am. 30 degrees Rain 7 PM 36 degrees

Got out notices for Kiwanis weekly luncheon.

Tuesday, December 12, 1922

8 am. 30 degrees Rain & Snow 7 PM 35 degrees

Thousands milling around borders of burned areas.

Wednesday, December 13, 1922

8 AM 28 degrees Snow 7 PM 32 degrees

Held regular meeting of directors of Kiwanis Club in Y.M.C.A. and then went to "free lunch..

Friday, December 15, 1922

8 AM 28 degrees Snow 7 PM 32 degrees

Secured little room in YMCA, ground floor and moved my office there.

Total cash receipts for December 1922 $136.00

Total for 1922 $1930.6.

J. A. Buchanan's Wauna Date Book for 1923 noted the following references to the aftermath of the fire.

Monday, January 1, 1923

8 AM 42 degrees Rain 7 PM 44 degrees

Dug in ruins of Odd Fellows Building for 3 hours, hoping to find some of the things I used to have in my office which would not burn. But the fire there is still burning.

Tuesday, January 2, 1923

8 AM 43 degrees Rain & Wind 7 PM 45 degrees

Took oath of office as Municipal Judge, to which I was appointed by the new City government.

Sunday, January 7, 1923

8 AM 52 degrees Rain – Storm 7 PM 53 degrees

Maurine started back to Eugene – U. of O. 8 AM

Dug in ruins of I. O. O. F. Building. Found little. A month after fire, but still burning.

Insurance company adjusters arrived promptly in Astoria to assess the massive damages. Many people did carry at least some amount of fire insurance, but few found the remunerations given them covered their losses.

The dreary weather and the cold of December and early January contributed to the hardships faced by those who had lost so much – in many, many cases, all of their possessions, their livelihoods. It took great courage and determination to carry on and to rebuild their lives, and to rebuild their city. J. A. Buchanan had written in his 1920 poem *Oregon, My Oregon* * —"Onward and upward ever, Forward and on, and on." That pioneer spirit of the past had to prevail once again.

*Buchanan's poem, arranged with music, was adopted as the official state song by a joint resolution of the Oregon State legislature on February 12, 1927.

Astoria, Oregon December 8, 1922 Estimated loss $10,000,000. Estimated insurance loss $2,500,000.

by Oregon Insurance Rating Bureau
Portland, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

The most disastrous fire in the history of the State occurred at Astoria, Oregon, on the morning of December 8, 1922. Twenty-four city blocks in the heart of the business district were entirely destroyed and heavy losses were sustained in many of the adjoining blocks. To attempt a definition of the total loss in terms of dollars and cents is beyond the province of this report and moreover, any such figure must necessarily be a rough approximation since many of the owners are not able to fix their losses accurately. Suffice it therefore to say that practically every store, hotel and office building in the principal mercantile section of this city of fifteen thousand inhabitants was wiped out by the fire and hundreds of persons were bereft of all their belongings. Coming as it did in the wake of the Hammond Lumber Co. fire reported by this office on October 2, 1922, the present disaster has left Astoria in a critical condition. Many of the business men feel the loss much more acutely since their Christmas stocks had just been received and they are deprived of the anticipated holiday trade. In most cases the percentage of insurance to value was unusually low, estimated not to exceed 30 per cent. The actual physical suffering of the populace has been slight, however, since relatively few residences were destroyed and prompt relief measures were undertaken by neighboring cities. Had the timely warnings of fire prevention experts been heeded, it is probable that the present catastrophe would have been avoided. A brief review of local conditions will make

this point clear and lead to a better understanding of the fire.

LOCAL CONDITIONS

Townsite

The historic little city, one of the oldest in the northwest, owes its growth and prosperity to its strategic position at the mouth of the Columbia River. The location poorly endowed by nature as a townsite consisted of a tide washed mud flat, situated at the base of a steep brush covered hill of clay and shale rock formation. The character of this site caused the principal business portion of the city to be constructed on piling over the tide flat, the hillside being utilized only for residences and a few public buildings.

In 1917 an improvement campaign was inaugurated which resulted in the construction of a seawall, covering the enclosed area with sand dredged from the river, and reconstruction of the city streets upon a higher grade so as to allow ample basement room under the buildings. The new street grade was designed to be constructed upon a sand fill between concrete retaining walls; but on account of the expense involved, this plan was not fully carried out. For some of the principal streets a cheaper construction was provided by laying asphalt on a timber deck supported by girders and posts with footings on sawed-off piling. This construction which contributed largely to the disastrous proportions of the fire, may be readily understood from the accompanying cross section diagram [original on file at the Heritage Museum]. On the map incorporated with this report, those wooden streets have been shaded to distinguish them from the filled or solid streets. The latter are still practically as serviceable as ever but the former are entirely destroyed.

Building Construction

Because the wood piling foundation in general use was poorly adapted to permanent construction and on account of the abundance of lumber, Astoria has always tended toward the almost universal use of wooden buildings. The fire hazard created by this light construction with an intercommunicating system of frame galleries below some of the principal streets, was early recognized by this Bureau, who were instrumental in having an ordinance presented to the city council requiring property owners to install adequate fire stops. Again the plan was frustrated by the taxpayers who objected to the expense, and the city remained a potential conflagration district.

FIRE DEPARTMENT AND EQUIPMENT

The Fire Chief reported that on the morning of the fire all apparatus was in service and all men on duty. Three men regularly on leave each day had returned to the stations before the alarm came in. The crew comprised

twelve regulars and ten call men. Distribution of men and apparatus among the four stations was practically as follows:

Hose Station No. 1 at 4th and Astor Streets

American La France automobile combination 40-gallon chemical engine and hose truck with 1200 feet of hose. Crew of two regulars and four call men.

Hose Station No. 2 at Melbourne and Taylor Streets

American La France automobile combination double 35-gallon chemical engine and hose truck with 1000 feet of hose. Crew of three regulars and one call man.

Engine Station No. 3 at 45th and Bond Streets

American La France combination single 60-gallon chemical engine and hose truck on a Locomobile chassis with 800 feet of hose. Crew of two regulars.

Engine Station No. 1 at 17th and Commercial Streets

Stutz triple combination 1000-gallon pumper, 40-gallon chemical engine and hose truck with 1200 feet of hose. Dodge truck with 800 feet of hose. Crew of five regulars and five call men. Fifty-five-foot extension ladder on truck arranged to be towed. (In reserve.) Double 60-gallon chemical engine arranged to be towed. (In reserve.)

The hose above mentioned together with hose in reserve on hand carts makes a total of 5000 feet checked up since the fire. The Fire Chief estimates that 3000 feet additional hose, formerly distributed at the stations, was lost during the conflagration.

THE WATER SYSTEM

Distribution Sections

Since Astoria is located upon a hillside, it is necessary to maintain a three level system in order to give satisfactory service throughout the city. The commercial district north of Franklin Street, from 3rd to 17th Streets, comprises the low service section; the middle service section is principally situated to the north of Jerome Street from 8th to 17th Streets with long line extending to district at similar elevation on the east and west, while the upper residential district utilizing the high service extends along the hillside on the southern side of the town from 1st to 53rd Streets. The gridiron in each of these sections consists principally of 6, 8 and 10-inch mains fairly well tied together and controlled by gate valves.

Storage Reservoirs

The lower service is supplied from a 500,000-gallon reservoir situated on 16th and Irving Streets 168 feet above city datum; the middle service is supplied from a 6,250,000-gallon reservoir situated at 16th and James Streets, 252 feet above city datum; and the high service is supplied from a 20,000,000-gallon reservoir located at the intersection of 34th Street and

James Street extended, 426 feet above city datum. A primary impounding basin of 100,000,000-gallons capacity is located on Bear Creek about 12 ½ miles southeast of the Post Office and 589 feet above city datum.

Supply and Distribution Mains

From the impounding basin a single 18-inch supply conduit extends about 10 ½ miles to the high service reservoir. The water bureau estimates a continuous flow of 4,000,000 gallons per 24 hours from this conduit. From the high service reservoir there are three distributing mains: A 14-inch pipe used to fill the middle service reservoir, a 12-inch pipe supplying the high service to the west and an 18-inch pipe supplying the high service to the east. From the middle service reservoir an 18-inch main extends down 16th Street to Jerome Street where it branches into a 14-inch main supplying the low service reservoir and a 10-inch main supplying the middle service gridiron system. Ample interconnections were provided between the high and low pressure systems so that the advantage of the large high level reservoir could be realized. Two of these connections were large automatic fire gates. They provided water supply from both sides of the burned area.

Hydrants

Public hydrants supplied from the above described distribution mains were well distributed in the burned area as may be judged by reference to the conflagration diagram on which they are indicated by dots at the street intersections. They were principally supplied by 6-inch mains and the typical spacing was 200 feet between hydrants.

STORY OF THE FIRE

Origin

Shortly after two o'clock on the morning of December 8th, fire was discovered coming from below the floor of a frame pool room situated at 532 Commercial Street and also at almost the same time it was discovered in a frame restaurant fifty feet to the east with a large two-story frame department store intervening between them. When the proprietor of the department store arrived, about half an hour after the first alarm, flames were pouring from the windows at either side but had not yet penetrated his store. It is not probable that any more definite information can ever be secured regarding the origin of the fire. Theories of incendiarism, sabotage, careless smoking and restaurant kitchen fire, have each been elaborated in the daily press.

Progress

The Astoria department received the first alarm at 2:12 AM. At 2:30 the pool room and the restaurant were gutted by the flames. At 2:45 the east end of the block was a roaring inferno and buildings across the street were steaming with the intense radiated heat. They had been dripping

wet from a rain that was falling at the time. Before 3:00 AM the block was practically consumed, the fire department had been driven from their position on Commercial Street and were "laying in" on Bond Street. A few minutes later burning walls collapsed and carried the fire across Bond Street to the north. Efforts to stop the spread of the fire were by this time becoming frantic. The feverish work of fighting against big odds, and the tremendous exertion of fighting against big odds, and the tremendous exertion of draining hose in the face of the intense radiated heat was telling on the firemen. It was continually necessary to lay in more hose to reach fresh outbursts of flame or to couple the hose to more remote hydrants.

The hopelessness of the situation was soon evident to competent observers. As the periphery of the burned area rapidly increased the men and equipment became more and more inadequate to cope with the situation. While the fire was being checked at one point it was gaining headway at another. But even as they realized that it was beyond control the refugees continually underestimated the possible extent of the blaze. Household goods and valuable merchandise hastily removed to places of supposed safety were in many instances overtaken by the fire almost before the transfer was complete. Quantities of goods removed from buildings burned in the streets, while other valuables sheltered from the rain in various improvised caches were several times removed to more remote points.

Outside Help

Many persons in the crowd of onlookers conceived the idea of calling on Portland, one hundred miles away, for aid. A newspaper man was the first to put the thought into action. His call was received by the Portland department at 3:25 AM. A second call from the Mayor reaching the Portland headquarters at 3:32 AM inspired them to prompt action. By 7:00 AM a special train had been procured and a crew of eight men dispatched on it with 6000 feet of hose, two 1100-gallon per minute steamers and a 750-gallon per minute auto pumper. Unfortunately the apparatus from Portland did not reach Astoria until about 10:00 AM, but even at that late hour it proved of great assistance in protecting the hospital, the city hall and the docks near 17th Street, all of which were of frame construction. No difficulty was experienced with the hose threads as both cities used the Pacific Coast standard.

The government dredge Clatsop which was stationed several miles away came to the rescue as soon as possible. The dredge moored to the dock at the foot of 9th Street shortly after daybreak. A long line of hose from her powerful pumps delivered strong streams of water which were the more effective and encouraging

since the city hydrants in this vicinity were beginning to fail.

Work of the Fire Department

The Astoria department under the leadership of Chief Foster are deserving of all praise for the splendid effort they made to cope with the situation. The little crew of twenty-two men (twelve regulars) made a losing fight from the start. Moreover, like the spectators, they underestimated the fire in its early stages. Their 1000 g.p.m. auto pumper was left to stand in a side street because ample water was available at the street hydrants. No attempt was made to use it until about an hour and a half after the fire had started and then it was not possible to obtain suction at a point near the fire. The pumper was taken to the public landing at the food of 14th Street and the suction hose run to the river. After a few hours of intermittent running, an old break on the compression chamber of the pump was reopened. An hour of valuable time was lost while the compression chamber was removed and welded.

No Fire Breaks

Witnesses of the conflagration suggest numerous places where the fire break formed by streets or buildings of relative good construction might have been made good if men and equipment could have been mobilized there at the strategic moment. Granted that this is the case such conjectures are of slight value since the condition imposed was impossible of fulfillment. No fire breaks existed which could be held with the apparatus available.

Dynamite Used

During the latter stages of the fire large quantities of dynamite were used in a futile attempt to check its progress. The powder was not well placed and in most cases served rather to augment than to check the fire. The only explosives available in the city were twenty per cent stumping powder which was too slow to be effective. It shattered the windows and let the fire in the more easily. By the time automobiles had returned from distant lumber camps with high powered explosives, it was too late for them to be effective.

Where the Fire Stopped

At 1:30 PM after eleven and a half hours of fierce burning the fire was under control of the Astoria pumper, three pumpers from Portland and the Government dredge. It had burned out on the sand flats to the east and at the court yards of the Post Office and Court House on the west. On the north the slight fire break afforded by the railroad right of way had been made good by the work of the pumper and the dredge. The successful maintenance of this fire stop can also be largely attributed to the fact that the natural draft of the fire drew cold air from the river rather than from the hillside. On the south the fire was brought under control where it reached solid ground. This is a most significant fact for Astoria to consider

and excellent testimony to the fire hazard of "open under" construction.

Control of Water During the Fire

It had long been recognized that collapsing of the viaduct street structures might seriously impair the water supply by breaking off street hydrants and other vertical standpipes or damaging the water mains. To minimize this danger the operating engineer of the water bureau was called promptly and stood in readiness to close such valves as might be necessary to conserve the supply and keep the pressure adequate. As anticipated, the pressure slumped when the streets burned. Control operation was commenced a few minutes after 4 o'clock by closing the valves on 14th Street at Commercial, Duane, and Exchange Streets, in the order named. Proceeding in a clockwise direction about the burned area, the engineer closed the valves in 8th Street at Duane, Commercial and Bond Streets. By this time it was 5 AM Returning to Franklin Street, he closed the gates at 11th and at 14th Streets. An hour or so later gates were closed in Commercial Street at 15th and 16th Streets and then one at 17th & Exchange. This completed the closing of the mains in the burned area. It was accomplished at 8:00 AM

CONFLAGRATION CONDITIONS

Inferior Construction

Analysis of the situation arouses surprise; not that the fire occurred but that it did not occur sooner. In a colloquial phrase, the city was "built to burn" and upon its inferior construction may be placed the responsibility of the conflagration proportions attained by the fire. The business district comprised block after block of congested frame buildings supported on timber structures and connected by wooden streets which formed a network of intercommunicating galleries.

Reference to the cross section diagram of a typical street illustrates at once the splendid medium they afforded for supplying air to the blaze and encouraging its spread. The tile fire walls shown did not cross the streets but merely encircled each block. The construction was too light to form a fire stop in the true sense and moreover, numerous unprotected openings are reported to have been allowed as exits from basements.

Effect on the Fire

In its early stages fire did not spread under these viaducts. They served rather as draft openings supplying air to the fire so advantageously that the intense radiated heat caused flames to break out across the fifty foot streets. It was only a relatively short time, however, until the creosoted timber below the streets took fire and flames were swept through the sub-surface tunnels to break out on the surface at remote points. The melting asphalt on the planks above added fuel and

created a dense choking smoke.

Weather Favorable

Weather conditions were apparently favorable to the fire fighters. There was practically no wind. In most cases noticeable drafts were caused by the fire itself. Light snow and rain fell in intermittent showers throughout the night. Despite many large brands carried considerable distances by the ascending air currents, no spread of the fire was reported from this cause. A glance at the diagram shows that the fire spread about equally in all directions. It is highly probable that if a strong wind had been blowing to carry the fire in any one direction the loss would have been much less.

Individual Protection

Practically none even of the better buildings had any private protection. The necessity of providing wired glass windows or fire shutters on exterior wall openings in masonry buildings is one of the lessons of the fire. The Spexarth building (a four-story reinforced concrete structure with composition roof) situated at the northeast corner of 8th and Commercial Streets has become conspicuous, since its concrete walls and floors withstood the heat. If standard window protection had been provided on this building the heavy damage to interior trim and finish could have been largely avoided. This was the only building of such construction in the burned area. Buildings of ordinary joisted construction with brick or concrete exterior walls such as the Astoria National Bank, the Weinhard Hotel, the Astoria Savings Bank, the Elks Club and others of similar construction, became an easy prey to the fire when the flames entered through the windows. Whether or not window protection would have saved them is of course problematical but it seems probable, since the department could then have concentrated its attention on the roofs.

Adequate Water Supply

Water for use at the fire was drawn from the high level reservoirs previously described. During the first two hours of the fire, hose streams from street hydrants were quite satisfactory. Pressure in the mains is estimated at about 90 pounds with all fire streams in action. The streams were not effective because the water did not reach the seat of the fire but the pressure and flowing capacity of the mains were adequate for the equipment available. After the first two hours the street hydrants and other vertical standpipes began to break under the weight of the collapsing streets and falling debris.

Fortunately the system of street mains was well equipped with control valves and officials of the water bureau were prompt to shut off sections in which it was found impossible to maintain the pressure. During the course of the fire the water level in the huge reservoirs fell only a relatively

small amount. Officials of the water department estimate the consumption at 5,000,000 gallons during the entire eleven hours.

THE BURNED AREA

To anyone acquainted with Astoria, it is ample to say "the business district burned." It was a level area, 32 acres in extent, 90 % light frame construction, and practically without exception supported on piling. The relative position and the extent of the burned area are indicated on the accompanying diagram. It will be understood that the shaded section indicates blocks actually burned. However, many buildings situated in adjoining blocks were damaged by smoke and water. A more comprehensive idea of what was burned may be obtained by using the accompanying diagram of the burned area as reference to the Sanborn Map which had been corrected to May 19, 1921.

In reference to important buildings standing about the rim of the fire, it may be said without exception that they suffered broken windows, smoke and water damage. Buildings thus affected are the City Hall in block 520, St. Mary's Hospital in block 519, Lovell's Garage in block 518, Y.M.C.A. building in block 67, Telephone Exchange in block 65, Creamery building in block 26, the Spexarth building in block 24, and tile constructed building in block 9.

LESSONS OF THE FIRE

Repetition of the Lessons from Preceding Conflagrations

Favorable climatic conditions and good fire records are no guarantee of safety and should have slight consideration in estimating fire protection.

A fire department cannot control a fire in a large congested area in which the fire can spread more rapidly than the department can get into effective operation.

The protection of exterior wall openings is an absolutely essential factor in preserving the integrity of the fire break formed by masonry buildings.

"Open under" construction without adequate fire stops is a conflagration hazard of the greatest magnitude.

Though it is doubtful that any fire department could have controlled the fire sooner than Chief Foster's men did, he lost his job—but not for long..

Astoria Daily Budget January 12, 1923

To the Editor:

From the People

Kindly permit me to say a few words through your columns anent the recent resignation of eleven men from the Astoria Fire Department in protest against the dismissal of Chief Foster. Having spent over eight years as a regular in the fire department, I have always felt a deep interest in its affairs, and since leaving there a few years ago have kept in touch with conditions through the *Budget*. I knew all of these men intimately, having worked with most of them and having fought many a fire with them, and I want to tell the readers of the *Budget* that when these firemen left the department the city was the loser. They were not a few disgruntled men, as I have seen stated in one of the papers, but they were the cream of fire fighters. There are a lot of little inside things happen in fire department work, which the general public does not see, and these are the things that go to make up a good department. It was my pleasure to make a close study of the department conditions throughout the west while a member of the Astoria department, and it could be safely boasted that there was not a better set of fighters than these on the Pacific Coast.

It is true that a fire finally got away from them, but it is no more than we have looked for these many years, especially since 1916 when the fire trap was created in the downtown district by the construction of viaduct streets without adequate fire walls. Let me tell you and the good people of Astoria, that there has been many a fire over there that threatened to go as this one did, and if it had not been for the gallant work of these men, their fierce and bitter determination, your town would have gone long ago. They were the kind of men who make good firemen; they were good men and true, but they have now passed on. This recalls the first of the old bunch to go. Jesse Jenkins, who in a ship wreck off the California coast some eight years ago gave up his life to save two women. Then there was Dicky Dealey, who used to long for the gong to tap so he would have a chance to fight, and the never-to-be-forgotten Paul Marion who was killed in a fall down the pole hole three years ago. You did not have to

pound these boys on the back to get them into the fire. I have seen Frank Smart at the nozzle standing up to a rushing fire, and watched the blisters rise up and break on his hands, and his helmet warp with the terrific heat, but move not an inch. I have seen Jochimson refuse to budge when the smoke was so thick the only thing that kept him alive was the oxygen coming through the hose and he finally had to be pulled out; I have seen Andrich and Davis stick to their post until they were almost completely blind from the heat and smoke and had to be guided home. I know that in the recent fire Coffman stuck to the line until the swirling nozzle threw him against a wall, almost senseless, after three outside men had dropped the hose and run. Yes, I could go on for hours reciting the heroic work of these men, but time and space prevents names to go down in the department history with the best of them. They were firemen all through, those boys. You did not see any of that bunch stand on the hill with the spectators and watch the Hammond mill burn because it was their day off, or drop the hose at a fire and run because it got too hot for them, deserting a comrade, and then hold their job through political nincompoopery. We wish Astoria and the Department well in the future, but it will not be

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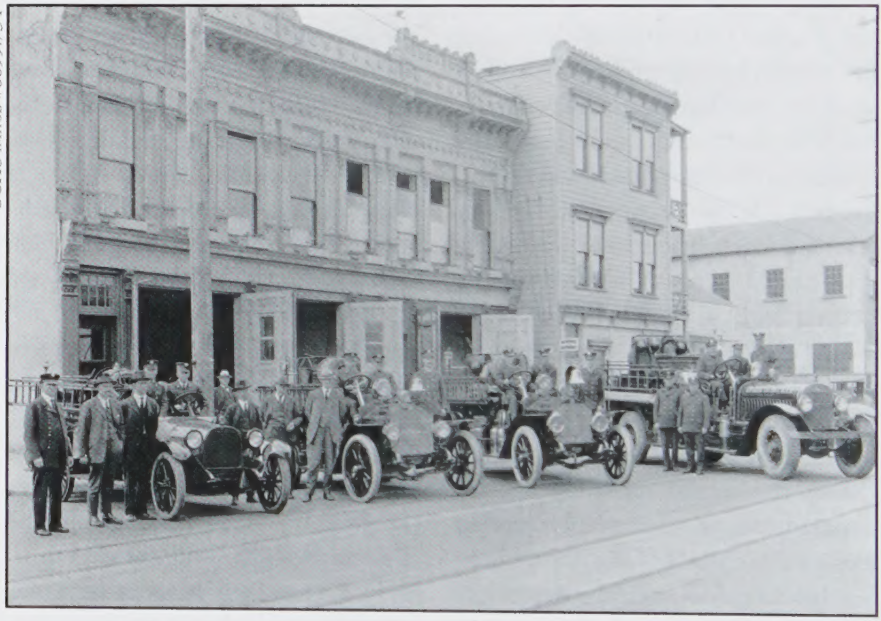

ASTORIA FIREDEPARTMENT IN UPPERTOWN, CA. 1924

easy to pick up a bunch like that. It has been said in one of the papers lately that Foster lacked organization in the department. If having a bunch of firemen like that who would follow him through Hades, and who knew their work like a book, is lack of organization, then the word is a joke. There were no captains and lieutenants in that bunch, they did not need any. When you bring that stuff into a small fire department you start trouble. When Foster was there they took orders from him alone and they carried them out. In his absence there was a boss provided for, and they all recognized him. Why Smart, Jochimson, Kearney, and several of the others were trained as fire fighters when they were still boys with a view to working them in, in later years and when the opening came, they were ready to step into it and were trained firemen. His system was good but the only trouble with Foster was that he was not a good publicity agent. He spent too much time doing his work and not enough in letting the public know about it.

I have never seen a chaotic condition at any Astoria fire, and will wager than even in the late great fire everything was orderly so far as the firemen were concerned. Also there has never been a piece of apparatus held up for lack of a man to run it. Some men are good fire eaters who are not apparatus men. But if Portland, Seattle or San Francisco can produce any better apparatus men than McCoy, Jochimson, or Smart, I would like to see them. Well, let on with the new city success, and trust that the fire department will build up again but in passing pay a tribute to these boys who are now forced out of it. I suffered quite a little financial loss in the fire myself, but know that not one penny of it would have gone if the nerve of these men and their leader could have saved it. I take off my hat to some of the greatest fire fighters that ever used a turn out suit. Astoria should be proud of them even if they did fight a losing fight and should at least wish them well as they pass push on.

(Signed) Frank Cearns

Frank Cearns was born in 1892 in Oregon and raised in Astoria. At age 18, he worked for the Astoria Fire Department. About 1920, he moved to South Bend, Pacific County, Washington where he later owned a hardware store. He died in 1977. Frank was a nephew of Chief Charles Edward (Ed) Foster and had lived with him and Ed's mother Jane Gillmore Foster. Ed Foster had been ousted from the Fire Department when the Ku Klux Klan had taken over the city offices in 1923 but regained his office in 1926.

CCHS IMAGE #5964.734

Stutz pumper demonstration during the Fire Chiefs convention held in Astoria in 1924.

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